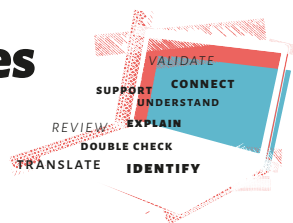


Science Media Centres



Journalism about science faces two main barriers. One is that modern science is intrinsically complex and organised into a multitude of disciplines, making it difficult to evaluate domain-specific expertise from the outside. The other is that new scientific knowledge often runs counter to public opinion, so journalistic education must first find a receptive non-scientific public.

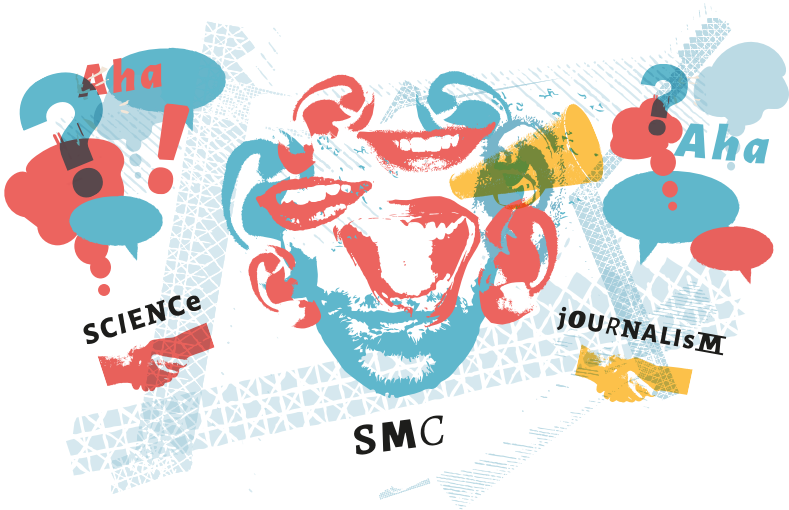
Because modern societies rely on robust scientific knowledge and reputable expertise for individual and collective decision-making, Science Media Centres (SMCs) have been created as new intermediary organisations between science and journalism, with the sole mission of independently informing public debate and discussion on the major issues of the day by injecting evidence-based science into headline news, with a focus on journalism (SMC Charter 2022).

The idea of Science Media Centres was first born in the UK in 2002, but today there is a whole family of independent organisations, such as the Science Media Centre Germany, founded in 2015. Operated by science journalists, it helps journalistic media and ultimately the public to access the best science more easily. Each SMC has a different organisational and funding structure, but they all work proactively with journalists to find third-party expert commentary on relevant scientific discoveries under embargo, to provide credible expertise and scientific commentary on breaking news, or to provide context for complex or controversial public issues such as nuclear energy, embryo research or artificial intelligence.

To gain the trust of journalists, an SMC must remain independent of science PR and science communication departments in order to provide a useful, free, honest brokerage service when science hits the headlines. To do so, SMCs create databases of knowledgeable scientific experts to connect them with journalists on deadline,

with the ultimate goal of helping to get more relevant science and credible researchers into news stories. Recruitment is done mainly by checking websites, scientific databases and bibliometric tools, but researchers at least at postdoctoral level who are willing to engage with SMCs are welcome to submit a CV. The international network of SMCs exchanges local scientific expertise on topics relevant to other publics.

Research on the impact of SMCs on science and journalism so far is rare. For example, Rödder (2020) sees the British SMC as an entirely new, distinct organisational form of science communication that is not subject to the logic of larger media organisations such as science journalism, nor to the logic of larger science organisations such as science PR. Broer and Pröschel (2022), on the other hand, describe the German SMC as a “broker of resilient knowledge, trust, and scientific values”.



Recommended reads:

- ♦ SMC (2022), *Guiding Principles for Science Media Centres (SMCs)*: <https://www.sciencemediacentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/SMC-Charter-003.pdf>
- ♦ Broer I. & Pröschel L. (2022), *Knowledge broker, trust broker, value broker: The roles of the Science Media Center during the COVID-19 pandemic*. *Studies in Communication Sciences* 22:101-118. <https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2022.01.3070>
- ♦ Rödder S. (2020), *Organisation matters: towards an organisational sociology of science communication*. *Journal of Communication Management* 24:169–188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2019-0093>